

## BOOK REVIEW

MARY F. IRISH. 2000. **Gardening in the Desert: A Guide to Plant Selection & Care.** (ISBN 0-8165-2057-7, pbk.). The University of Arizona Press, 355 S. Euclid Ave, Suite 103, Tucson, AZ 85719. (Orders: [www.uapress.arizona.edu](http://www.uapress.arizona.edu), 520-621-1441, 520-621-8899 fax). \$17.95, 210 pp, 20 halftones, 6" × 9".

*Gardening in the Desert* is an excellent book for anyone interested in desert gardening. It provides a starting point for anyone who has never encountered some of the unique challenges of desert gardening and landscaping. This book could not be more timely for an area of the United States that has experienced rapid population growth followed by a significant increase in demand on natural resources. Water is at a premium in low desert environments and utilizing plants adapted to dry habitats should be near the top of desert inhabitants' conservation priorities.

The book is divided into 11 chapters, beginning with conditions of desert gardening. This first chapter addresses the seasons of the low deserts of the Southwest, soil content and texture, as well as annual precipitation and water supplementation in desert gardens. Subsequent chapters are arranged according to general growth form: trees, desert palms, shrubs, perennials, wildflowers and other annuals, vines, cacti, agaves, other succulents, and distinctive desert plants. Each chapter begins with pertinent information on the growth form. The chapter on wildflowers and other annuals, for example, opens with recommendations on propagating annuals, suggests soil amendments and advises on proper seed collection. After a short introduction, each chapter lists a myriad of suggested species to include in your garden. Each plant that is listed includes common and Latin names, a short description of the plant including height, flower color and phenology, information on water and soil requirements, as well as pruning advice for woody plants and other perennials. In the woody plants chapter, proper placement of tall or vigorous growth forms is also stressed.

Several chapters in particular would be useful to novice desert gardeners. The chapter on cacti seems especially practical. Within the chapter is information on how to properly transplant cacti, how and when to water cacti, and how to avoid frost damage in susceptible species. Numerous examples of native *Opuntia* are mentioned in the book, but sadly the author mentions only *Mammillaria* and *Coryphantha* in passing and has no specific suggestions for planting. This is unfortunate since members of these two genera are aesthetically pleasing and lack the glochidia which make *Opuntia* gardening potentially painful. The chapter on agaves is noteworthy because a short horticultural history is provided to enlighten the reader on their ethnobotanical heritage. In the last chapter, the author discusses unusual plants that do not readily fit into a general growth form. These include ocotillos, hesperaloes, and yuccas, among others. A preventative approach to pest and disease control is stressed throughout the book, thus decreasing the need for toxic pesticides.

Although twenty figures provided in this book, they are black and white. The black and white photos of different garden settings do little justice to the plants that thrive in desert environments. Color figures would have greatly enhanced the book and would have provided further evidence of the natural beauty of these dry landscapes. Although the author stresses the importance of choosing garden plants wisely, it cannot be overstated that great care should be taken when planting exotic species. Many non-natives from Africa, Australia, and the Mediterranean, including *Senna artemesiodes* and *Dimorphotheca sinuata* mentioned in the book, can become pests in a matter of a few growing seasons and these escapees diminish habitat for the native flora. There are numerous native choices that should be considered first before planting exotics in any desert garden.

All in all, this is a valuable book for anyone interested in desert gardening and landscape practices. Irish's anecdotal writing style makes reading this book both educational and entertaining. The book provides her experience and opinions regarding desert gardening and these words of wisdom would be most useful to amateur and master gardeners alike. It would make a suitable addition to any desert gardener's library.—Amy Trauth Nare, Fort Worth, TX, U.S.A., [amy\\_trauth@yahoo.com](mailto:amy_trauth@yahoo.com).